

CHRONOLOGICAL NOTES ON BYZANTINE DOCUMENTS V¹

62. Irreconcilable Dates

In *CSBE* 64-66 we gave a list of "documents . . . in which the date given by regnal year, era of Oxyrhynchos, or consulate cannot be reconciled with that of the indiction on any theory of the indiction, as well as those in which an indiction agrees with one or more criteria but disagrees with a further one." It omitted dates by the Era of Diocletian (treated separately in *CSBE* 45) and conflicts involving consular dates before 542 where the indiction pointed to a later date than the consulate (treated separately in *CSBE* 52). In the present article, we take up the documents coming from the reign of Justinian and from those of his successors to the end of Byzantine rule in Egypt. A division of the problems by reigns and within these by type of problem seems to us to yield reasonably reliable criteria for deciding which date is correct in a conflict. (We include a few documents not in the list in *CSBE* 64-66 in our discussion here.)

Justinian

There are eight examples where the indiction and the consulate conflict and other criteria are lacking:

<i>P. Princ.</i> III 154	7.ix.545/546
<i>P. Cair. Masp.</i> I 67095	1.iv.547/548

¹ For the nature of this series, see *BASP* 15 (1978) 233. It is cited as *CNBD*, with installment and item numbers. We cite our works on Byzantine chronology as follows: *CSBE* = *Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt* (Stud. Amst. 8, Zutphen 1978); *RFBE* = *Regnal Formulas in Byzantine Egypt* (*BASP* Suppl. 2, Missoula [MT] 1979).

<i>P. Stras.</i> I 4	13.ii.550/551
<i>SB VI</i> 9292	11.ii.552/553
<i>P. Cair. Masp.</i> II 67130	25.ii.556/557
<i>P. Lond.</i> V 1766	14.i.558/559
<i>P. Stras.</i> 248	6.i.560/5.i.561
<i>PSI XIV</i> 1427	26.vi.564/565

An examination of these dates shows that two fall in January, three in February, one in each of April, June, and September. The concentration early in the year (which we saw [*CSBE* 53] was characteristic of earlier consulate/indiction conflicts as well) suggests strongly that the scribe has in these cases failed to advance the consulate. The error is the easier here in that every one of these is a case of the postconsular era of Fl. Basilius, when all that changed on 1 January was the numeral of the postconsular year. The fact that the error is in the same direction in each case, i.e. the second and higher number is that indicated by the indiction, points to a failure to advance the consular number. The reverse assumption, that in all cases the scribe had advanced the indiction number too soon, seems in itself unlikely and in any case disproved by the concentration early in the year.

The three cases in which the indiction agrees with the consular date but both disagree with the regnal date are also instructive:

<i>P. Cair. Masp.</i> III 67303	27.iv.552/553
<i>P. Oxy.</i> XVI 1970	8.vi.553/554
<i>P. Oxy.</i> XVI 1972	22.vii.559/560

In each case, the regnal year points to the lower year, the indiction and consular to the later. Now Justinian's *dies imperii*, from which his regnal years were reckoned, fell on 1 April. These documents fall in the first, third, and fourth months of the regnal year. Since this reckoning of the regnal year was connected to no calendar used in Egypt (or anywhere else), occasional scribal failure to remember the date when it changed is not surprising. We may legitimately follow the indiction plus consulate against the regnal year in these cases.²

In two cases, documents have four dating criteria, of which the indiction, Oxyrhynchite era years, and regnal year agree against the consulate:

<i>P. Oxy.</i> I 140	26.iv.549/550
<i>P. Oxy.</i> I 133	19.x.549/550

² The hypothesis (which we note in *CSBE* 87 n. 1) according to which these texts are based on a 1 August start of the regnal year (Justinian's accession to sole power) does not seem worth retaining.

In these cases the consulate points to 549, all other indicators to 550. The agreement of the three indicators must be given the greater weight here.

Somewhat less clear are the cases in which the indiction and regnal years agree against the consulate:

<i>P.Oxy.</i> XIX 2238	7.viii.550/551
<i>P.Lond.</i> V 1692a	3.v.554/555
<i>P.Lond.</i> V 1686	7.xi.564/565

In these cases again, the consular year is one behind the others. While the weight against the consular date is rather less heavy than in the examples where an era date was also present, we do not doubt that the regnal and indiction years are the correct ones in these cases.

A few miscellaneous items remain. In *P.Oxy.* XVI 1986, the indiction disagrees with the Oxyrhynchite era years. The indiction is given as 12, the era years as 226–195, giving us a choice of 29.x.548 or 29.x.549. Since the crop concerned in the contract is the fourteenth indiction's, and since the lower number is the more suspect in general, we have no doubt that the era year is correct in this instance. In *P.Oxy.* XXXVI 2780, according to the editor's text, the indiction (2) points to 16.vii.554, while the regnal and consular dates point to 16.vii.553. In reply to our inquiry, however, Dr. R. A. Coles has kindly examined the original papyrus and writes "your expectations of $\nu\delta() \alpha$ [are] quite correct." All indications therefore point to 16.vii.553, and there is no inconsistency with normal Oxyrhynchite practices (the uneasy hypothesis emitted in *CSBE* 27 n. 1 is thus no longer necessary).

Finally, in *P.Cair.Masp.* II 67170 and 67171 (16.iv.564 or 565) the indiction disagrees again with the regnal and consular dates. In this instance it seems possible that the indiction is again in error, but the source of the putative error is not obvious. On the other hand, the regnal year had changed only 15 days before, and it is conceivable that the indiction is right after all, and the others wrong.

To summarize: we find that in no instance is the Oxyrhynchite era year at all likely to be wrong, and in one or only a handful of cases is the indiction incorrect; those can be demonstrated only by the conflict of the indiction with the more accurate era year, or by a combination of other evidence against the indiction. Both regnal and consular dates, on the other hand, are comparatively frequently wrong, and the consular date is never right against other criteria except in a few instances where it supports the indiction against the regnal year.³

³ There are also papyri in which a date p.c. Basilus may seem to conflict with the indiction; but these result only from the failure to include a numeral for the year of Basilus, a rather common practice and—by the standards of the preceding century—a normal one. Cf. *CNBD* II 12, n. 7.

Justinus II

We find relatively few conflicting dates in this reign. One of them, *P.Stras.* I 40, finds the indiction pointing to 568 against 569 for both regnal and consular reckoning. The date, 27.ix, is not near the beginning either of the consular (julian) year or the regnal (15.xi) year; we therefore conclude that the indiction is wrong.

There are three other examples of conflicts. One of them, *PSI VI* 709, sets the indiction plus consulate against the regnal year; the other two (*P.Cair.Masp.* II 67159 and *P.Lond.* III 1327) set the indiction plus regnal year against the consulate. The conflict is only apparent, however. All of these documents are examples of formula 3 in *RFBE* for Justinus II, the formula beginning βασιλείας καὶ ὑπατείας. Texts with this formula always give only one number for both regnal and consular reckoning, and these did indeed coincide during the first ten and a half months of the year. Between 15.xi and 31.xii, however, the years were out of phase by one; and the three documents listed in fact belong to 19.xi, 16.xii and 19.xii, just this period. It is apparent therefore that in *PSI VI* 709 the regnal year has failed to be advanced, while in the other two the year has been advanced before the consulate changed.

In short, the consulate has ceased in such situations to have any independent value aside from the reckoning of regnal years.

Tiberius II

The reign of Tiberius II provides, for its short duration, a number of problems. Tiberius became Caesar on 7.xii.574 and always dated his regnal years from that date. But two documents seem to have a different reckoning, which H. I. Bell (*P.Lond.* V 1725.1n.) suggested was based on Tiberius' accession as sole ruler on 6.x.578 (we repeat this suggestion in *CSBE* 90 n. 1). One of these, *P.Lond.* V 1725 = *P.Monac.* 3, has a βασιλείας καὶ ὑπατείας formula of the kind which caused difficulty under Justinus; year 2 of this reckoning is an impossibility, strictly speaking. But if the reckoning is from the consulate, which was 579, then in 580 we find no problem. In other words, the person using this formula reckoned the joint regnal-consulate figure from the sole accession or consulate, rather than from the accession to Caesarship. The rather peculiar *SB VI* 9085 inv. 16050 has only regnal dating and indiction; the indiction is that of 579/80, and 8.ix in that indiction would be 579. The regnal year 1 which is mentioned would then refer to 579, assimilated to consular reckoning without mentioning the consulate.

Other problems occur with regnal dates in this reign. In *Aegyptus* 56 (1976) 69 (cf. *BASP* 15 [1978] 237) we find the indiction, era of Oxyrhynchos, and consulate taken together consistent against the regnal

date some seven months after the change of regnal year. In *PSI* VII 786 (cf. *CSBE* 66 n. 24), the regnal year again has failed to advance (this time only in January, however, from a 7.xii *dies imperii*), and disagrees with the indiction (cf. *CNBD* VIII 85 [forthcoming]). In *PSI* VIII 963, the regnal date disagrees again with indiction and consulate, and it has failed to advance on 21.x, almost eleven months after the proper date. In *P.Oxy.* I 135, the indiction points to 21.iii.579, the regnal date to 21.iii.578; it is evident that again the regnal reckoning has failed to change on time, four and a half months later.

The evidence from Tiberius' reign, then, indicates that there was considerable confusion in regnal calculations, principally stemming from a certain amount of ignorance of the need to calculate from the Caesarship of Tiberius, and partly from gross carelessness in keeping track of the proper date for advancing the regnal count.

Mauricius

A peculiar error showing the interconnectedness of regnal and consular reckoning occurs in *P.Oxy.* I 137, in which the indiction and consulate point to 11.i.584, while the regnal year points to a year later. It appears that the scribe has advanced the regnal count along with the consular one, ten days before.

A whole group of documents have conflicts of indictional dates versus regnal ones:

<i>P.Lond.</i> V 1728	8.iii.584/585
<i>PSI</i> XIII 1367	2.ix.584/585
<i>SB</i> VI 9085, inv. 16055	12.ix.588/589
<i>SB</i> VI 9456	20.ix.593/594
<i>P.Grenf.</i> II 86	15.xii.595/596
<i>BGU</i> II 395	7.ix.599/600

In every case except that of *P.Lond.* V 1728, the date indicated by the indiction is one year later than that by the regnal year. *Mauricius' dies imperii* was 13.viii, and it is striking that four of the documents fall in September and one in December. It seems highly likely that in all of these cases, there has been a failure to advance the regnal numeral at the proper time.

The situation is entirely different in *P.Lond.* V 1728, however. There the regnal year is later, and we are not near the change-date for regnal calculation. It seems to us rather more likely that the indiction is wrong here, but we do not see any secure basis for deciding.

Two final cases need to be treated, *P.Monac.* 10 and 13. These provide dates of 28.i and 18.i in their respective years. It is the indiction and regnal

year which point to the higher year, the consular to the lower; one is led to suppose that the consulate has simply not been advanced on 1.i as it should be. (We will return on another occasion [CNBD VIII 85] to the general problem of "New Style" dating.)

Phocas

Two documents under Phocas contain striking disagreements of the indiction with the regnal year, in both cases a matter of *two* years' discrepancy: *SB* I 4503 and 4505. In such a difference, it does not seem possible to offer an explanation with the available evidence. Phocas' *dies imperii* was 27.xi, while the two documents date to 10.i and 11.x; no obvious solution presents itself.

Heraclius

Four clear examples of failure to advance the regnal count occur under Heraclius:

<i>P.Oxy.</i> XVI 1981	25.x.611/612
<i>BGU</i> XII 2208	8.x.613/614
<i>BGU</i> XII 2209	8.xi.613/614
<i>SB</i> VI 9461	15.x.631/14.x.632

Since Heraclius' *dies imperii* was 5.x, it is clear that these examples, all within the first month or so after that date, are cases of incorrect regnal dating.

There are two other problems: (1) *SB* I 4662 (cf. *RFBE* 69), in which indiction and regnal dates agree on 11.vii.632, while the consular year 20 can be only 630. It seems clear that the consulate (very rare in this reign) is in error. (2) *SB* I 4319, in which the regnal year of Heraclius Jr. is too high by one; see *RFBE* 72–73 for discussion.

Summary

The detailed discussions above have shown that the Oxyrhynchite era years are in no case convicted of inaccuracy; they coincided with the traditional civil year and were evidently prized by the Oxyrhynchites. The indiction, the principal means of chronological reference throughout Egypt, is almost as consistent in its accuracy; it is almost always evidently right against the consular or regnal reckoning. These latter two, although commonly used in the headings of documents, evidently did not have quite such widespread understanding and are comparatively frequently the source of errors. Sometimes one of them is right against the other, sometimes they are both wrong. It varies from reign to reign which seems more reliable; neither is in general terms the more dependable.

A few principles emerge as helpful in dealing with inconsistencies: (1) the later date is more likely to be the correct one, as the scribes had a natural tendency (like modern letter and check writers) to forget to change the numeral of a year which did not coincide with the one they used for most purposes; (2) these lapses of calculation occur most commonly in the few months after the date when the consular or regnal year changes, but they are found in small quantities throughout the year; (3) coping with three or four dating systems confused ancient scribes to a considerable degree, and while many errors in editions have turned out to be the work of the editors, a considerable number are attributable to the natural confusion of the scribes.

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